

Aporia

by Psicygni

Category: Star Trek: 2009

Genre: Romance

Language: English

Characters: N. Uhura, Spock

Pairings: N. Uhura/Spock

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2016-04-14 15:44:35

Updated: 2016-04-19 21:10:19

Packaged: 2016-04-27 18:09:16

Rating: M

Chapters: 2

Words: 13,061

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Aporia (n) an expression of real or pretended doubt or uncertainty especially for rhetorical effect; a logical impasse or contradiction; especially a radical contradiction in the import of a text or theory that is seen in deconstruction as inevitable

1. Forelsket

This is a series of seven drabbles spurred by a prompt on tumblr and written as an (at sometimes loose) interpretation of the definition of the chapter title.

* * *

><p>Forelsket _- The word for when you start to fall in love. A euphoria in a sense; the beginning of love. _

...

In typical fashion, every class has one student who performs well above the rest. As it is, Cadet Uhura appears particularly perturbed that it is not her.

Again, she examines the exam he distributed only moments ago in class, as if continued scrutiny will return a different assessment than he already provided. "But who scored higher?"

"I cannot share that information with you," Spock says, though this should be self-evident.

"Ok, how much better were their marks?"

"You may ask that of your classmates, but not of me." The tone he employs would have any other human cadet unable to meet his eyes. Uhura simply stares back at him from across his desk.

He determines at some length that waiting for her to respond is, apparently, fruitless.

His hand spread on the surface of his desk, he says, "The intention of assessing your work is to serve as a benchmark of your ability to grasp the course material, not a venue to compete against other students." He waits for a moment before adding, "Perhaps your time would be better spent in study than in my office hours."

Her eyes narrow slightly at this advice before she gives him a single nod and leaves his office without another word.

When her footsteps have faded down the hall, he brings up her record. She is not his best student, and considering the scores of students above her in his class, she will not outcompete their standing. Still, she isâ€| intriguing.

â€|

"Sir?" he hears. "Sir, just a moment, excuse me, Commander?"

It is raining. Hard. He has brought neither an umbrella nor a suitable jacket and while in retrospect both were a poor choice, he is currently more concerned with the state of his socks and the hours that will elapse until he is at his leisure to return to his quarters than he is his failure to sufficiently check the forecast.

"Cadet?" he asks, blinking against the water dripping into his eyes. From one of the other paths that bisect the Academy quad, Uhura rushes toward him.

"Sir, for the midterm-"

He holds his hand up and she stops so abruptly that her mouth is still open. If she wishes to ask him if the material covered in the most recent class will be on the midterm, he does not have patience for that, especially when accosted in this weather, meters from any available shelter.

"I believe I was clear on the exam's content, Cadet."

"No, I'm sorry, it's just that-" She shakes her head, rain splattering from the ends of her hair onto her shoulder. "I really don't understand the underlying theory behind ethnographic methods we went over in last week's class. On the quiz yesterday, I realized I wasn't entirely sure how to answer and the exam is tomorrow and-"

"-Cadet." Only weeks into the semester and already he is well accustomed to her ability to, given a chance, build up what he has heard humans term 'a head of steam'. He is entirely more interested in a haven from San Francisco's inclement weather than listening to whatever justification Uhura has constructed. "You will perform acceptably."

"It's not-" She grabs the strap of her bag where it hangs from her shoulder and then apparently changes her mind over where to place her hand, because she crosses her arm over her stomach instead. She takes a deep breath and straightens slightly. "I'm sorry if it seemed like

I cared only about my grades and fine is not-

Again she shakes her head before running the back of her hand under her nose and then through the water on her cheeks. Behind her is an awning over the entrance to the engineering building. His meeting that he is now no longer early for is in the opposite direction.

"Cadet," he says again and she sniffs once, hard. In his boots, water pools. "I would not trouble yourself."

Any more, he cannot say. On his desk in his office sits her quiz, both with it's correct answers, and the midterm exam he completed just moments ago, which does not contain questions in the area of her concern.

She does not appear satisfied, though she finally nods.

He searches for what more he can tell her and settles for simply nodding in return before hurrying towards his meeting.

He is already late, and made more so by the wind whipping rain against him, though upon his arrival to his destination, he finds that he is hardly the only one delayed by the unpleasant weather. Half of the officers scheduled to attend have yet to arrive, and the few that have are engaged in idle conversation with each other. Dripping, he settles his belongings on the table and attempts to adjust his clothing as to make it more bearable to focus on the tasks in front of him.

Yet, despite his attempts, the cold and damp and unsettled nature of his arrival continually turn his thoughts from the meeting that has yet to begin.

Surely, other students in Uhura's class have similar concerns, though perhaps none are quite so willing to chase after him on a day such as this. There is, then, an argument to be made that they too are suffering from similar distraction, and that in the interest in ensuring that they spend their time focused on their preparation for their exam and not on needless anxieties, he takes advantage of the lull in his day to power his padd on and, wiping away the damp that covers the screen, posts the grades he has already nearly finished collating.

â€|

The message arrives at 22:47 on a Saturday evening. When his padd pings in receipt of it, Spock turns down the music he was listening to, a new composition by T'Leia that was released only the day prior. He shuts the recording off entirely after he reads Cadet Uhura's note the first time and examines it more closely the second time through, leaning forward on his couch and holding his padd closer as if to better make sense of what she wrote.

A narrative analysis of Romulan histories. An interesting choice for the final paper. And not surprising that she cannot locate the needed sources, as many have not been translated from the original High Romulan.

In truth, including the issues of access that she has already

identified, she likely does not possess sufficient time to both obtain the needed resources and find a translator, which he begins to write to her, along with a recommendation that she reconsider her topic when he stops himself and reads her message through for a third time.

She asked after where she might find the needed papers, not help with reading them. Curious. It would be illogical to answer a question she has not posed, despite his desire to bring to her attention the difficulties of translation and the reality that she must consider this. Of course, while her marks have not elevated her to the head of her class - no matter that she has drawn significantly closer - she is not unintelligent. The opposite, in fact, which she proves weekly, holding lively and at times heated debates with her classmates. More than once, students who not only outscore her but also outrank her, years closer to their graduation than she is, have capitulated under her unrelenting arguments, which she is often able to formulate before her classmate has finished speaking. It is quite a sight.

He wakes the screen of his padd when it begins to dim. If she has not already realized the challenge she has set for herself, she will soon be aware of it, and while he does not have the needed access to the documents she requires, he can obtain it for her. He also has a number of other sources that may be of use in her analysis that he can send her on Monday morning.

Though she is, apparently, currently working, no matter that it is a day that most cadets spend in leisure pursuits. And he is not occupied. He crosses to his desk and begins sorting through a stack of padds there, setting two aside and then a third.

It is some time before he remembers to turn his music back on, and longer still until he finally rests for the night, a set of notes left out on his desk for the next day.

æ|

On two separate occasions, she expresses that she does not have to occupy his time during his office hours and does not intend to detract from his availability for other students. Twice, he assures her that there is no problem. Both times, she sits back into her chair with an ease that no other student has ever displayed in his presence.

Of course, no other student has ever had the audacity to argue about the content of his slides, nor his grading standards, so he supposes it would follow that surprise is illogical.

"I'm just not sure that I really grasp your explanation of how Rousseau disproved Desai's theory of xenolinguistic determinism," she says as she flicks through her notes. From the way she is holding her padd, he can see the measured, neat lines of her writing, the precise indents in the margin, and a number of arrows and circled words. When she is not engaging her classmates in discussing, she spends every class bent over her padd, occasionally looking up at him and making and holding eye contact, only to look down once more and resume her rapid writing.

He leans forward and clasps his hands on his desk. "You did not follow it or you did not agree?"

One side of her mouth curves and she ducks her head down. "Present tense, sir. I currently do not grasp it."

"I will surmise, then, that the intervening hours since class concluded were not sufficient for you to accept my reasoning."

"Those are your words not mine, Commander."

"I see," he says and sits back in his chair. He must leave for a meeting in thirty eight minutes. He calls up the notes he prepared for his lecture and then thinks better of it and reaches for a filmplast containing Rosseau's most recently published paper on the matter, certain that if she did not concur with the material he presented earlier, she will not do so now, and that further explanation is not only called for, but necessary if he is going to prove his point.

â€|

"I'm not your best student."

He was not expecting that she would argue upon being offered the position. "I am fully aware."

"I didn't-" She scratches at the side of her mouth with her index finger. "I thought that applying for your TA was a bit of a long shot."

It was. It is.

"You have exceptional skills in a number of pertinent areas," he reminds her, as if that fact is not also written on the resume and cover letter he received, both of which are stacked on his desk. "Unparalleled, in fact."

He does not anticipate that she will break eye contact with him upon these statements, but she does. Of course, he does not anticipate many things about her, which likely will continue when she serves as his assistant. If she serves as such.

He considers her more closely. "Is there a problem?"

"I'm just surprised, is all," she says and gives him a small smile. It appears strained.

"It isâ€|" He attempts to locate the correct term in Standard, pausing for perhaps too long as he does so, because she shifts in her seat. "Unusual to find a student so interested in a field."

"Oh." She smiles again just as quickly, though this time it is accompanied by a slight laugh. "I sort of figured I was bothering you."

"Not at all."

"Ok," she says and he wishes to - but does not - ask her to clarify if she is accepting the job or simply acknowledging that he was not inconvenienced.

"It is not incumbent upon you to take the position, Cadet," he says and as he does, he pushes aside the beginnings of an disappointment that threatens to fill him. It is inconsequential. A psychosomatic response to the anticipation of a longer job search, and this time not with the candidate of his preference among the applicants. Still, there are other students who can fill the role, though none who have shown the endurance or ongoing propensity towards the subject as she has so thoroughly and repeatedly demonstrated.

"No," she says and he nods, redoubling his efforts to ignore the drop in his stomach. "Of course I want it, I'd be crazy not to- Yes. It'sâ€¦ it's wonderful, thank you, sir."

He nods again, this time far more slowly, attempting to parse her answer and to not - as it would be rampantly illogical - give way to the relief that is on the verge of flooding him at the idea she will be working with him for the entirety of the coming semester. For him. Working for him, he repeats to himself, though perhaps not with the vehemence that the thought would carry if any other student sat across his desk, a slow, genuine smile working its way across her face.

â€¦

When she reads, her lips purse and her eyes narrow. He does not think it is a conscious expression, nor how her lips occasionally move over a word.

Every three minutes, she sips from her mug of tea. Twice, she taps her stylus on her desk and once even puts the end of it in her mouth before her eyes dart over to him and she abruptly removes it.

It is entirely distracting to have her in his office. He has not had an assistant before, and were the requirement not newly imposed by the department, he likely would not have sought one out.

She hands him graded response papers at the end of her shift, provides him with her suggestions for discussion questions based on the upcoming readings, and leaves him with a smile and instructions to enjoy his afternoon.

He does so, reviewing her comments, leaving notes on her questions, and examining the angle at which she has left her chair, imperfectly straight in front of her desk, slightly off kilter in a way that continually catches his eye, the only object in the room that is out of place.

â€¦

She looks up from her padd when he places four filmplasts on the edge of her desk. "You are researching Standard acquisition rates for bilingual students. These might be of interest to you."

"That's for Buccheri's class."

"I am aware." She had said so just four days ago. Perhaps she believes he does not remember, or even that he was not listening, though why she would tell him such information if she did not want him to absorb it, he cannot determine.

It is, however, conceivable that taking interest in such a small detail is somehow inappropriate. As for exactly how he cannot determine, but it is possible. Humans are, as ever, difficult to understand.

Her smile is so slow in coming that for some time he thinks it will not appear at all. As it is, the filmplasts rest where he has placed them for what he deems as entirely too long before she reaches for them with both hands.

"Thank you." She shuffles them, flicking through each in turn to scan their titles. "This is really thoughtful."

"It was logical," he corrects though the qualification does not detract from the way she continues to smile.

â€|

He has the beginnings of a headache. Another day, he might be tempted to return to his quarters and meditate long enough to unwind the tension coiling in his temples. Today, he can only manage enough time in his schedule to watch the replicator fill a mug with hot water and spend the few seconds it takes attempting to clear his mind of thoughts.

Behind him, the sound of footsteps informs him that his relative solitude in the break room is at an end. Briefly, he closes his eyes before gathering himself, taking his mug, and determining to leave as quickly as he is able.

A hand is holding open the cupboard that stores the selection of tea the students and professors of the department maintain, the assortment eclectic and ranging from interesting to unpalatable. The hand reveals itself to belong to Cadet Uhura, who presses the cabinet door closed yet does not move from in front of it, instead examining the box she has picked out.

"Is this good?"

It is. And, as such, it is the variety he was intending on selecting for himself, though upon his confirming nod, she opens the container to reveal that only one bag remains.

"Wanna flip for it?"

"Pardon?"

Her laugh is easy and bright and fills the small room. "A coin. Never mind, you can have it if you want."

His head throbs. "The coin?" he asks before he can properly dissect her reference. When he does, he shakes his head. "I see. It is of no consequence."

As she has not yet moved, he reaches past her to open the cupboard and, when no tea that is suitable is readily available, begins to sift through the contents. It is, as ever, disorganized, the selection perpetually rearranged and improperly returned to any semblance of order.

"No, now I feel bad, you were here first. Here I'll-" From his hand, she plucks a box he has reached onto the top shelf to retrieve and, before he can either speak or move to stop her, has opened both a bag from it and placed it in an empty mug, and done the same for the variety of tea in contention, dropping it into the steaming water he is still holding. "There. Everyone's happy."

He could correct her. He is neither predisposed to happiness, nor if he were would today's set of circumstances be grounds for such. And yet, given the way the corner of her mouth pulls upward and how at ease she is as she fills her mug with water, he finds that he does not have a particular desire to disagree with her.

It is simply that he has very little disposable energy. Tonight, he will retire earlier than is typical, and in the meantime attempt to bear out his day with as much composure as he can. The tea, he decides as he takes a small sip, watching the Cadet replace boxes of tea in the cupboard, is helpful in that aim.

â€|

"Commander?"

"Cadet?"

She holds out a filmplast to him, and then seems to think better of her choice and instead comes to stand behind his desk, directly next to where he is sitting. She lays it next to his padd, where he can read her neat writing in the margins of the article, and see the paragraphs she has circled.

"I'm wondering if this is really the best example of semiotic evolution." She taps one finger to a line she has underlined. Her arm is mere centimeters from his. "The article you assigned last semester was a bit clearer."

"It was published five years ago now."

"Four and a half years was ok for last term?"

He is not always certain when humans are making a joke, though her eyes are lit up and her lips are twitching, so he is reasonable sure that it is the case now.

He lets his eyebrow rise. "Yes."

"Gotcha."

She is fully smiling now and is still very near to him. He pulls his padd closer. "Thank you for your advice, Cadet."

Later, he examines both papers and then his syllabus. Her point is not baseless nor unfounded. In fact, it is logical to the degree that he might have realized it himself, if he had not put so much stock in using only papers as recent as possible.

For some time he sits at his desk considering the oversight before he turns to her, ready to inform her of his reassessment before he can

remember that she has left for the day. An oversight, to be sure, as she had already said goodbye and told him to enjoy his afternoon, and odd that he presumed she would still be there.

Regardless, he has the remainder of his own work to complete, despite the fact that she has moved on with her day, leaving him to attend the numerous extracurricular activities in which she participates and likely to eat dinner in the company of her classmates.

The silence of the end of the day has always aided his concentration, so as there is no reason that today is any different, it does not logically follow that he is confronted by a measure of distraction as he resumes his work, one which is not ameliorated by a greater resolve to focus, nor a firmer attention to his padd when his eyes continue to stray to the filmplast she had placed on his desk what is now some hours ago.

â€|

"Sorry," she says the moment he enters his office.

She does not elaborate, which leaves him standing in the center of the room, his eyes on the back of her head. She quickly shuffles through the material on her desk, stacking the majority of it and putting it into her bag in a manner entirely more haphazard than is ordinary for her.

A single filmplast escapes her cull, drifts away on a current of air stirred by her quick motions and is carried from the desk to the floor, coming to rest six centimeters from Spock's right boot. It is an exam. A completed exam, one filled out in her writing and when he picks it up and looks more closely at it, marked through with corrections and assessment that considering her performance in his class, is less favorable than he might have expected given her intelligence and dedication to her work.

He should not be looking at it. She affords him the privacy of not prying into his belongings, despite the hours she spends in his office, and even on days like this morning when she was here without him, he did not even consider that she might take advantage of the relative quiet to investigate any of the more personal objects he keeps here.

She is not meeting his eyes, half turned as she is in her chair, her hands on her thighs. As he waits, she rubs a fold of her skirt between her thumb and forefinger and continues to not look up at him. His attempts to parse her body language are, as ever, imperfect. She may be angry, though he has seen her in a state of abject irritation before and generally it is not accompanied by her shoulders being sloped inward as they are now, nor does she avoid eye contact in such situations. The opposite, in fact. She could be tired, perhaps, exhausted as many cadets become during midterms, though he has taken note more than once as to how her endurance has never appeared to flag, for she is as alert at the end of each work day and in the final hours of each week as she is any other time.

She swallows and the entire line of her throat works. "I apologize, sir, I was reviewing material for one of my courses. I thought- I didn't hear you coming."

When he holds her exam out to her, she does not take it, so he sets it on the edge of her desk. The topic is Interstellar Navigation and by the content, it appears to be from the beginning class in the required sequence. Curious, as he does not believe she has taken even a single intermediate class in the Xenolinguistics department, instead placing into the advanced courses without completing any prerequisites. "It is no matter."

Clearly, she did not understand him, for she adds, "I'm sorry for using my time in your office for anything other than my assistantship."

"As long as your work is completed on time, it is not an issue," he clarifies. His interest is in the outcome of her work, not the process through which she goes about it. Perhaps he should have made that clearer.

"The library was full," she continues. Her hair drags over her back as she shakes her head. "Is full, currently, still."

When she sees him looking at the filmplast she has not yet touched, she seizes the edge of it and pushes it into her bag.

"There is no need to further explain, Cadet," he tells her and means it as some form of comfort, except that the corner of her mouth tightens.

Embarrassed. The word comes to mind so suddenly that he is not certain he has actually accurately recognized the clues in her mannerisms or if it is simply one of the only options left as an explanation, though not one that he would typically apply to her. Even when her classmates would disprove a point she had vehemently stood behind, she showed no discomfort, often instead displaying a smile and at times going as far as to raise both of her eyebrows at the other student in what he had presumed was recognition of their skill in formulating a counterargument, not a capitulation of her own point. Indeed, he is not certain that he has ever seen her display any such clear discomfort in his presence as she is now.

"You are welcome to use this room at your leisure, as long as it is not during my office hours or another meeting," he tells her as she runs her fingers back over her hair, twisting her pony tail around her hand before abruptly releasing it. She has access to his calendar, though he does not always input every feature of his week as he is fully capable of remembering the details of his schedule. He could, though. It would not take much time at all, and would likely increase her efficiency in grading and preparing his slides, as she would not have to wonder about his availability.

She nods in answer and picks up her stylus as she bends over her desk, now clear of her personal work. Again, he looks at the filmplast, now with one corner exposed where she imperfectly placed it in her bag. It is some time before her shoulders uncurl and she sits as she normally does, her back straight.

â€|

Humans have a tendency to always assume that one more person can fit into a turbo lift. Other species he has encountered at Starfleet do not appear as inclined to force one more occupant into such a small

space, so he attributes the habit to some type of peculiarity of Terran culture.

As he always waits for a subsequent lift rather than emulating such a custom, he is often afforded a place at the back of it, which has the added benefit of being pressed near to fewer bodies, as the wall is at his back as opposed to a colleague or student. In typical fashion, he is not so fortunate when it comes to the proximity of others to the front of his body. Today it is Cadet Hannity whose arm brushes against his. She pulls her elbow back and gives him a swift smile that he takes as an apology, though why such a facial expression accompanies an indication of contrition, he has never been able to explain. Cadet Uhura is similarly shuffled towards him, though she does not bestow upon him a similar smile. Instead, she murmurs 'Sorry' as her shoulder is forced into his chest, where it remains due to the three fourth year students who are apparently intent on taking this specific turbo lift to the upper floors.

Next time, he will make use of the staircase. This is entirely illogical, to be so packed into such a small area. It is a fire hazard, for one. Two, he is not certain that the weight limit specified by the manufacturers is currently being observed.

In such close proximity, he can feel the edge of Uhura's bag against his stomach and can smell what must either be her shampoo or another cosmetic she applied. She may have just showered. Perhaps after making use of the gym before the class day began, or maybe it is her habit to do so in the morning regardless of engaging in exercise. Though he is nearly certain that like many of her species and as required by the Academy's physical standards, she often goes jogging. There is a path behind her dorm that leads to one of the city's many parks, and while making use of it himself, he has twice seen her enter her building dressed in athletic clothes. It would be a logical habit for her to develop even beyond the requirements of Starfleet, for in much the same vein he specifically allocates time each week to not only leave campus, but to seek out as much of a natural landscape as the city can provide in anticipation of years spent onboard a ship. He had not considered it before, but perhaps if she had the same inclination, he might someday encounter her on those paths. It would be pleasant, he believes, to spend time in her company in such a manner, though now that he considers it he realizes that dispelling the image of her engaged in an athletic pursuit is slightly more difficult than he might have anticipated. He can too clearly picture her with brighter eyes, similar to her expression when she finally grasps a difficult concept, and with the shine of sweat on her skin.

He is suddenly aware that he can feel her breathing, with her body in such close proximity to his.

He has always had an overly detailed an imagination, a fault he has long attributed to his human heritage. The light indicating the passage of floors ticks by entirely too slowly, interminably dragging out the moment until he will be capable of introducing more space between them. The stairs would have been a better choice indeed.

â€|

The end of the work week is, as ever, heralded by what could nearly

be termed a stampede of footsteps in the hall. The final lectures have been let out for the afternoon and along the length of the hall, offices open and are quickly vacated.

In his own, Uhura hooks her arm over the back of her chair and twists further towards him. "Really."

"That is what the research showed."

"Huh," she says. Her heel drumming against the rung of her chair does not indicate the direction of her thoughts, though her tone does not suggest she is convinced. "I just would have thought that the study would have demonstrated a greater statistical effect."

At the gym, he considers her doubt further, the rhythm and ritual of _suus mahna_ accompanying his thoughts. So too does he dwell on the topic on the walk to his quarters and while he cooks dinner, slicing through a carrot and contemplating her words. After he eats, he reaches for his _ka'athrya_ as is his habit, only to replace it on its stand and continue to hover in front of it, his mind working. Indeed, he can think of nothing else, not when he turns on his monitor to watch the latest news report from Shi'Kahr, a nightly ritual he never quite abandoned despite the years since he has lived there, nor when he types out a response to his mother's latest message. In all reality, his thoughts are so thoroughly occupied that at length, the only logical option appears to be to indulge them.

The article in question takes him some time to locate. He finally finds it on the bottom shelf of his bookcase, shuffled there with a number of other padds he has not needed to make use of in some time. Sitting on the edge of his couch, he reads it through twice. The research design is logically sound. Stratified random assignment by species, gender, and education level, with a suitably populated control group and low attrition among participants, though as he examines the provided regression table, for the first time since his initial read of the paper he reassesses his perspective on their predictor variables and the interaction effects they chose to include.

He lowers the padd to his lap, considers for only a moment, and then uploads the paper to send to Uhura, hesitating only when he attempts to add an accompanying message. _For your further consideration_. Immediately, he deletes it. _I believe you may have had a pertinent point_. No, it is not that he believed that, he was unsure this afternoon and now he knows that she does. He erases that line as well. _This may be of interest to you_. That is accurate, at least. He stops himself from tapping his finger on the edge of his padd when he realizes he has begun to do so. He is uncertain as to whether more is required. He begins to write his name only to stop as she surely will know who the message is from, both from the attached file as well as his name and rank in his ID. _Have a pleasant evening_, he adds. He looks outside. It is completely dark out. It might, in fact, be night though the differentiation between evening and nighttime has never fully been explained to him. _Enjoy your weekend_, he writes instead. That is certainly suitable.

It takes him longer than it should to finally send the message, as he continues rereading the two lines over and over again until he forces himself to stop.

â€|

She is looking directly at him. He resists the urge to turn over his shoulder and check if there is something of interest on the wall behind him. He would not do so anyway, for one because he is certain there is not and two, he is equally sure that it is him that she is looking at.

Her attention on him isâ€| confusing. Though perhaps not uncomfortably so, which is further confounding as he is not entirely at ease being the subject of any scrutiny.

"Yes?" he asks, though when she simply blinks at him, he realizes that she was not, in fact, seeking to garner his attention.

"What?" She very slightly shakes her head and then her eyes widen. "Sorry, I'm sorry, I just-"

She turns to her desk and goes so far as to raise her hand to her face, seemingly to block their view of each other, though she quickly returns it to her work surface, picks up her stylus, sets it back down, and then reaches for her padd.

She stares down at it, though her eyes do not seem to be moving. "Are you well?"

"Yep," she nods. She brushes her hands down her skirt where it covers her thighs. "Yes, sir, I mean."

She does not raise her attention from her work for the remainder of her shift, nor does she ever provide him with an explanation.

When he twice realizes that he is doing the same as she was, his eyes on her with no real intention behind the study of her, he decides he is not in need of clarification and busies himself with his own work, bending over his desk and attempting to keep his attention there, despite a strong compulsion otherwise.

â€|

Given the hour, he did not anticipate that anyone else would be in the building, though of anyone who would have chosen to spend their evening at work, he supposes it would follow that it would be Uhura.

However, he did not foresee that she would not be in her uniform, but instead in civilian clothes, nor that she would be sitting at her desk with one hand fisted in her hair and her eyes squeezed shut tightly as she speaks to herself.

"Cadet?" he asks and she startles so thoroughly that her stylus falls from her fingers to skitter across the floor.

He retrieves it for her, as she is currently sitting stock still with her hand pressed to her chest.

When she finally takes it from him, their fingers pass close enough that he can feel the warmth of her skin.

He grips his padd with both hands.

"I did not intend to disturb you," he says at length, when they have both just continued to watch the other. Humans are not predisposed to long silences. He learned that quickly upon his entry into the Academy, though it would seem that it bothers Uhura less than most others.

"I was just going over some homework," she says, though that is of course obvious to him.

Still, he has come to learn that humans expect some type of response and while he is certain Uhura would excuse him the effort of replying to such an inane statement, he is willing to offer it nonetheless. "I see."

He begins sorting through the padds he left on his desk, though even with his back to her he can tell she has not resumed her work. Perhaps he is distracting her. In that case, he will not linger.

"Sir?"

"I will not disturb you much longer."

"No, Iâ€| May I ask you a question?"

His hands still. He turns. It would not be inaccurate to inform her that she just did, though his attempts at Terran humor often are in vain and tonight especially she does not seem disposed to an overly elated mood. Rather, her bottom lip is drawn between her teeth and she bites at it hard enough that he supposes there must be some pain.

"Of course."

"I'm having some trouble calculating this warp vector," she says, which is not an inquiry. Regardless, he steps close enough that standing behind her, he can see her padd.

"Has your class covered yet how to account for the presence of solar winds?" he asks her before he can remember that it is considered rude on Earth to read from a position over another's shoulder.

"Aren't you busy?" she asks as he pulls the chair that normally sits in front of his desk, placed there for visitors, over next to hers.

"I was only coming by to retrieve a document," he tells her, though in truth he had meant to do so in order to return to his apartment and peruse it in the relative comfort of his quarters, rather than his office. Though it is really no matter at all. That work is hardly pressing and it would not be the first evening he fills with some menial task to distract from the silence of his rooms.

And regardless, he enjoys teaching. Watching dawning realization take hold in a student has always been satisfying to a degree he never would have anticipated upon accepting the position as an instructor, and with Uhura it is even more so.

For a moment she just looks at him before she turns back to her padd.
"We went over it this week."

His stylus is on his desk. When he gestures for hers, she hands it to him, the casing foggy with the imprint of her touch. "Then if you account for the strength of the flow of ionization from the nearest star," he begins and points the tip of her stylus to where the information needed is outlined in the question before he quickly writes down the pertinent equation.

She props her elbow on the edge of her desk and holds the bridge of her nose between her thumb and forefinger. With her eyes closed, she says, "I'm really bad at this."

That is obvious. Not only was it apparent from her exam, but the number of times she has tried and failed to correctly complete her homework is evidence enough, crossed out calculations filling nearly the entirety of the filmplast in front of her.

"The material is difficult to grasp," he offers. For some. Not for everyone, but clearly it is for her.

The skin at her temple creases as she squeezes her eyes shut.
"Impossible," she corrects.

"You possess sufficient intelligence."

Her laugh when she expels it is far shakier than any he has ever heard from her. "Doubtful."

"Cadetâ€¦"

"I never wanted you to know this," she says, but does not specify what 'this' is, or why she then asked for his help, or why she continues to sit there next to him, if none of it was her intention.

He could excuse himself. She must have classmates willing to help, for she certainly has on more than one occasion offered assistance to other students when they were in a similar state of need, though that no more explains why she is alone in his office at night than she made clear why she shared any of this with him if she did not mean to.

"I failed to pass an engineering exam during my second year." He did not need to tell her that, and he does not add that it was because he decided not to study for it, sure that his memory of the material covered in class would be sufficient. She at least achieved passing marks on her midterm exam, albeit barely so. Though at least his statement does have the equalizing factor of making two of them who perhaps did not entirely think through their statements. Illogical. Completely so, to speak without proper consideration.

He believes the silence that they sit in could technically be termed awkward, but he is not certain. Regardless, when she eventually removes her hand from her face, her eyes are redder than is typical and she keeps her gaze on her padd.

"Really?"

"If it would be of any assistance, I can also tell you about the Interspecies Ethics paper that my instructor asked me to rewrite before she would accept it."

She looks at him from the corner of her eye. "Don't you teach that class?"

"Yes."

Her exhale is accompanied by an easing of the tension in her features. "That does help."

She draws her knees up, doing so by hooking her heels onto the rung of her chair. She must have removed her shoes some time ago, because her feet are only covered in socks. Her long fingers comb through her hair where it has fallen forward and he does not watch as she tucks it behind her shoulder, his focus on her padd and the beginning of his explanation, not on the presence of her so close to him, nor the quiet of the building around them.

â€|

In the mornings when he arrives at his office, she often looks up at him and smiles. At the end of the day, she tells him to have a good night and more than once reminds him - needlessly so - that she will see him tomorrow.

When he makes himself tea and offers her a mug as well, she always accepts, going as far as to ask after the variety when it is one from Vulcan and not Earth, often repeating the word more than once to ensure proper pronunciation. Once he hands it to her, she sits with both hands around her mug, her legs crossed, and her focus on her reading.

It occurs to him that while he is typically inured to the progression of the semesters, letting the time pass as it will with no more thought to its advancement than how it affects the rhythm of his work, this semester he is aware in a way he has not been before of the date that finals will begin and the few days after them until Uhura's tenure in her position will come to a close.

Illogical, he instructs himself, to dwell on such a topic. He can no more stop the imminent end of the semester than he can draw out the days until then, and regardless it would not do to linger on such thoughts, especially when he is preoccupied with the welling disquiet that he increasingly must dispel every time he thinks of the time left, as well as the anticipation with which he greets mornings he will find her in his office, already at her desk and turning towards him with a greeting.

2. Mamihlapinatapei

Mamihlapinatapei - The wordless yet meaningful look shared by two people who desire to initiate something, but are both reluctant to start.

* * *

><p>"Well," Uhura says. She taps each finger in turn against the padd

she holds folded against her chest. "Goodnight, then."<p>

"Have a pleasant evening," he offers in return.

There is a moment in which she appears to hesitate but then she is turning and disappearing out the door, joining the stream of cadets and officers leaving the building to celebrate the long awaited end of the last day of the semester.

Spock remains at his desk. Her chair is neatly pushed in and her work surface is empty, cleared of her belongings now that her position has ended.

It is some time before he rises and longer still until he extinguishes the lights and shuts his office door. Typically, the end of the semester brings a modicum of relief, with the ability to turn to personal pursuits before the next terms begins. Tonight however he is less buoyed by the thought of an increased chance to practice the newest composition he is learning on his _ka'athrya_ or the fact that he will be able to visit the small Vulcan market by the Embassy, as it is routinely held when his classes are in session. He walks down the empty hallway and decides that if neither of those ideas are appealing, he will instead attempt to focus on other ways he might fill the coming days, ignoring as he does so the way in which his footsteps echo in the quiet.

â€|

The book he intended to purchase is not where it should be. Again, he scans the author's last names and again reaches the place on the shelf that it should rest, and again finds it empty. He presses his finger into the slight gap there. Then it is not misshelved, but missing.

He resists the urge to close his eyes in frustration and similarly dismiss the accompanying desire to sigh.

It is no matter. He does not need the book to begin with, and seeking out a paper copy is an indulgence that is not strictly necessary, and therefore not entirely logical. He can download an edition for his padd, or simply abandon his plan to read it. There was no purpose behind the intention other than the notion that he might as well attempt to enjoy himself over the vacation, and there are other avenues he can pursue.

He stands for some time at the shelf before realizing that the lapsed minutes have been spent in contemplation of the gap between the remaining volumes and not anything remotely useful. He turns on his heel and is halfway to the door when he stops, pausing midstep, sure that he identifies in the periphery of his vision the cover of the book he has come here to find.

And so too does he recognize the hands holding it open, as well as the forehead behind it that is creased in concentration.

Slowly, the book is lowered and he is blinked at.

"Cadet," he says.

Uhura tips the book towards her chest and holds it there bent open

with her fingers pressed to the front and back covers. "Hi, Commander."

He is certain that he is too aware of the silence of the shop, the peculiar lack of sound from other patrons, and the stillness of her in the chair she is occupying and him some distance away. What to say next does not come to mind, though such banalities of conversation never have, and not for the first time he is sure that he should have not spoken in the first place, so as to avoid this moment that seems destined to stretch onwards, unending.

"I didn't expect to see you here," she finally offers.

"I did not either." Without the familiarity of his desk between them and the work they shared, the attempt to cast about for his next words is far more difficult than he could have anticipated. "You did not return home for the break."

It is not even a question, but a bald statement of fact. Illogical, incredibly so.

"Oh, no, I'm sticking around."

"Likewise," he says, even though she did not inquire.

"Really?" she asks and sits up straighter.

He is not certain if he is supposed to answer that. He begins to, only to stop, and then starts to speak again, since hesitating halfway through an action is inefficient and therefore illogical, before realizing he is not certain what he was intending to say if he spoke at all.

Again, she spares him. "There's a talk tonight on comparative sociolinguistics," she tells him. She folds the book closed and sets it on her lap, one finger marking her place.

"Is there?" he asks, though she had just said that there is.

"It sounds like it's going to be pretty interesting."

"It is a fascinating topic."

"I know, you wrote that paper on it." He is aware that he did, though he did not know that she had ever read it, but before he can inquire into her interest, she adds, "I was thinking about going. I thought that maybe you knew about it and-" Whatever the completion of her sentence is, she does not articulate it, her voice giving way to a shrug.

He did not know about the lecture, or her curiosity into the subject, or her continued presence on campus, or the fact that there was any possibility he would encounter her today, a fact that is still somehow agitating him despite his efforts towards if not equanimity, at least greater composure. He tucks his hands behind his back and carefully considers his next statement before voicing it. "There is an event tonight at the department to celebrate the end of the semester."

Though the movement is nearly imperceptible, her shoulders drop. "Oh,

that'sâ€¦| that's right, I forgot all about that."

Clearly, more thought was required before speaking. "It is not incumbent upon you to attend," he quickly clarifies.

"No, I know- Are you going tonight?"

"I had thought to," he says even though he had not. He had planned to be occupied in another fashion rather than participate in the celebration his colleagues were hosting for themselves and the department's cadets, though admittedly the pastime he was envisioning is currently resting in Uhura's hands. A change of plans would, then, seem in order. "Are you?"

"There's that talk."

He blinks. She had just said that. "Of course."

"But I should go, I think," she says and nods and adjusts her grip on her book.

"I see," he says slowly. "Did you not wish to go to the lecture on sociolinguistics?"

"No, I do."

He nods carefully. "Understood."

For what he is sure is too long, they simply look at each other. When he cannot continue to endure the illogical nature of the moment, the inaction and the silence between them, and the disconcertment that has plagued him since he chanced upon her, he gestures to the door, the motion needlessly abbreviated as he realizes only upon doing so that he does not, in fact, necessarily need to leave right then.

"Oh," she says quickly. "I don't meant keep you."

He shakes his head, which is needless as he also articulates, "You are not."

"No, but if you have to goâ€¦|" She offers him a smile, one that quickly fades. "You didn't get a book, did you find what you were looking for?"

A multitude of answers flit through his mind before he finally just offers, "Yes."

She tucks her hair back behind her ear. "Maybe I'll see you tonight."

Given the casualness of her response, he is not entirely certain he should offer anything more concrete than she has. "Perhaps." He takes a step towards the door, only to stop again. "Enjoy your afternoon."

Her smile is wide and fast to come, the force of it seemingly at odds with how her hands flutter over her book in quick rapid movements as she opens it and closes it again without taking her eyes from him. "Thank you. You too."

â€|

He watches her from across the room despite his attempts to remain engaged in the conversations in which he finds himself. Twice, their eyes meet and in both instances he looks away when she does, vexed with his inability to keep the subject of his thoughts on the colleagues in front of him.

He is simply tired. It is to be expected that even with his endurance that stretches far beyond the bounds of his Terran colleagues, he is not immune to the weariness the end of a semester brings. The recess of classes will hopefully provide ample opportunity for meditation, which will aid him in regaining his focus. He will spend the time until classes resume resting, as was his intention, rather than attending functions such as this one that he has no true interest in.

Still, he does not leave for some time. It would be rude to excuse himself too early. He made a point of traveling here, so he might as well stay for long enough to make polishing his boots worthwhile and moreover regardless of his own wishes, his supervisors have always impressed upon him the need to attend social events.

Conversation swells throughout the room, laughter carried over the clink of drinks and the soft strains of music playing at a level too low to easily be detected. He sips from his glass and does not look away from his conversation again, sure that if he does he will not be able to restrain the urge to scan the crowd, and unsure of his command over where his eyes will alight if given a chance.

â€|

With no set schedule to his days, he finds himself choosing arbitrarily when to perform routine tasks. Breakfast does not need to occur in time for him to attend his first obligations of the morning, so he is at his leisure to eat when it suits him, and to linger at his table as he will. He can practice his _ka'athrya_ when he wishes, rather than only in the evening when the business of his day has concluded. Watching an orchestral performance recorded on Vulcan does not need to be timed with his next responsibility, as he has none. Even leaving his quarters for the day becomes optional, to the degree that he is certain he should be more stridently finding pursuits to occupy him, rather than spending the recess between semesters aimless in his too familiar rooms.

As he arrives to the mess hall, Uhura pushes out the door as he approaches it, and on the steps to the building, they both stop at the sight of each other. He has nearly missed her all together, except that rather arbitrarily he had decided to seek out lunch before making a trip to his office that is not strictly necessary but will serve to fill his early afternoon.

She lets the door slide shut behind her as she takes a step closer to him. "It's leftovers," she tells him, her face drawing up. "Just so you're forewarned."

"Thank you." She is clearly on her way somewhere. He could - should - bid her farewell. Instead, he says, "It is curious that with the availability of the number of replicators, the dining staff would

make such a choice."

"Efficient, right?" she asks. The sun overlays her in gold and shines on the shirt she is wearing, a white that lights up bright. It is not, strictly speaking, within regulations for her to be out of uniform in the mess hall. It is, however, a rather needless policy. It would be, per her point, very likely inefficient to enforce it, let alone mention it, and therefore illogical.

"Precisely," he agrees, which makes her smile.

"I'm afraid you won't have much company," she says with a nod towards the doors she just exited through. "It's pretty lonely in there."

Another moment later, a different choice to his morning, and he might have not seen her at all. The prospect of lunch alone is significantly tempered by the chance encounter, though given the picture in his mind that is quickly coalescing at the thought that he could have arrived even earlier, perhaps not entirely so. "That is unfortunate."

"Yeah," she says, squinting up at him through the sun that shines in her eyes, "It is."

Even with the brief interaction, once he steps inside he cannot help but notice that the room feels darker than normal, though he is certain it is a trick of the light, either the brightness of the light outside, or the lack of other occupants, or the combination thereof that causes him to blink at the sudden depth of the shadows, and perceive more clearly than he might have perfect emptiness of the tables, devoid of occupants and the din of noise that normally crowds the room.

â€|

Physical exertion has the intended effect of blanking his thoughts. Slightly shaky and sure to be sore in the morning, he grips his shoulder in his opposite hand and works the joint forward and back, deliberating if he is quite done for the day or if despite the risk of injury given his muscle fatigue, he might continue. With his attention turned towards the weight room, blessedly empty of cadets seeking to improve their physiques, and his gaze similarly occupied, he does not pay as much mind to where he is walking as he might otherwise, sure as he is that he is alone.

He is not. A hand is pressed to his sternum and he is stepping back so quickly he is at risk of tripping.

"Oh, sorry, sorry, I-"

"-My apologies."

Uhura's hand remains raised in front of her, her palm exposed. He quickly lowers his elbow, releasing his hold on his own shoulder.

"I thought-" She laughs, though at what he is uncertain. When it threatens, he ignores the thought that he can still feel her fingers pressed against him. "I thought I was alone in here."

"I did as well," he says though that is surely obvious.

She runs her hand down the front of her shirt, one of the gray ones issued by the Academy to all students, a Starfleet crest on the chest. Without her turning, he knows there is a second, larger one on the back. Her shorts bear the same emblem and though he has heard colleagues lament the fact that Starfleet has taken the opportunity to also supply personnel with branded socks, the edge that shows above her shoes indicates that Uhura's appear to be of another make.

He pulls his eyes back to her face. She is still smoothing her clothing, her fingers finding and tugging on the hem of her shirt. "Well at least I wasn't singing."

Strands of her hair have come loose and are hanging in a disordered way he has never before seen, her appearance typically immaculate.

He blinks. "Are you not in the Academy Chorale?"

"I- Yes." Her eyebrows rise. "I didn't realize you knew that."

"It was on your resume."

"Of course." She shakes her head. With the motion, the strands of hair sweep against her forehead and cheeks and she quickly brushes them back. "Of course it is."

There were other details of note, such as her participation in the Xenolinguistics Club, the subject of her undergraduate degree, the title of her honors thesis, and the fact that she serves as a mentor to a number of non-Terran first year students. He could, though he does not, ask about any of those as he is not certain of the appropriateness of conversationally discussing information gleaned in such a manner.

He could instead ask about her day, though the obvious answer that she has spent it at the gymnasium is one he can provide for himself, or how her week has been going except that he has now encountered her numerous times and this too he knows.

Though not the particulars. Of course, inquiring after such would necessitate determining if it is information she wishes to share with him, and as he is not in the habit of such type of idle exchanges, he is not certain he can accurately establish such.

"I was going to go grab a bite to eat," she says and he nods, the relief that she has landed upon something to say far more difficult to dispel than he would like it to be.

"I will not keep you."

Again, she tucks her hair behind her ears. "Are you planning on staying here for a bit?"

As he considers the immediate future he realizes that while he was previously experiencing the beginnings of weariness, it has since been replaced by an agitation that puts him in mind of quite a lengthier exercise session than he might have otherwise planned.

Perhaps cardiovascular conditioning would be in order, to work through the restlessness that has so significantly arisen.

"I believe so."

"Well, enjoy yourself," she offers and at a loss for how else to continue a conversation, he finds himself telling her the same in regards to the remainder of her day.

As he walks past the weight room, the door to the women's locker room sliding shut behind her, he realizes entirely too belatedly that he is in fact rather hungry, in addition to being overly unsettled. There is no reason to look behind him, as he is certain she is gone, and when he does, the emptiness of the corridor confirms it.

Water, then, to alleviate the dryness in his mouth that has arisen as a result of extended exercise, and then continued exertion until he regains the equanimity he had previously found, though he is not certain he can accurately predict precisely how much more physical activity will be necessary to recover that calm.

â€

He concludes that there are not more than a couple dozen personnel on campus, for he repeatedly sees the same few staff members, instructors, and students in the empty hallways, the echoing lobbies, and deserted paths of the quad. Therefore, he gives the chance of the figure alone on the bench near to the Engineering building being Uhura quite favorable odds, ones that increase precipitously as he draws nearer. It is a rather pleasing spot, a towering, ancient elm growing between the building and her chosen seat, casting her in dappled sunlight that plays over her as the wind shifts through the upper branches. Logical, to spend time outdoors when they are so often cooped up in buildings.

She notices him before he has reached a distance at which it would be suitable to speak to her, so that her padd is lowered by the time he draws near enough to offer her a proper greeting.

"I was just doing some reading," she says by way of response, her chin nodding to the padd she has lowered to her lap.

"For class?" he asks and then nearly shakes his head. Classes are not in session. He tries again. "It would seem that you appear to enjoy the pursuit."

"It's for a class next semester," she says, her face drawing into what could well be termed a grimace. "And yes, I very much like it and no, please don't tell my roommate you found me doing this."

That, at least, he can predict the likelihood of with certain odds. "I will not."

Her laugh is light. "Thanks."

A light breeze pushes the sleeve of her shirt against her arm. "Did you finish your other book?"

"I did."

"Was it satisfactory?" he asks, though he is nearly sure he knows the answer.

"Absolutely."

"Excellent."

Her fingers curve over the top edge of her padd. He is aware that standing in front of her as he is not only causes her to look upwards at a precipitous angle, but also that holding a conversation with such a different in stance is not common on Earth, and yet seated as she is on the center of the bench there is not only no room for him, he is also stymied as to whether it would be appropriate for him to join her, were there available space.

She can stand, if she wishes. Though he is the one interrupting her, so it is unlikely that she would be so inclined. He could leave, of course, though that would negate the fact that he walked out of his way to greet her and furthermore, she has suspended her reading and as far as he can discern, does not object to his presence.

He nods at her padd. "What class is that for?"

"Cardassian Orthography."

He might have guessed that by the title. "Flanagan is teaching that next semester."

"I've heard she's good."

"I took it with her when I was a fourth year student."

She raises both eyebrows. "What did you think?"

"I believe you will find her syllabus compelling."

She places her palm on the surface of her padd. "Good, I wasn't sure if I should really take it now or wait until next year."

He could say more about the class, though he realizes he is not overly inclined towards continuing a conversation about the happenings of their department.

From her position on the bench, she is still looking up at him, her chin tipped upwards to do so.

He considers backing a step away to ease the angle, though he does not. "I hope I am not disturbing you."

"You're not." She is once again gripping the padd in both hands. "That class with Flanagan. You weren't a cadet that long ago, were you."

It does not sound like a question, though regardless he says, "No."

She nods and then quite suddenly says, "You may call me Nyota."

"Pardon?"

"When we're notâ€¦ I don't work for you anymore," she says as though he was unclear that when the new semester commences, they will not have reason to be in each others company for hours at a time. "And I probably won't take any more of your classes. So." She appears to be chewing on the inside of her cheek. She only stops to add, "You don't have to."

"That is acceptable," he says quickly before she can retract the offer.

"I, um-" She ducks forward until he cannot see her face and he realizes as she pauses before speaking again that he too has leaned forward. He straightens and puts his hands behind his back, too. When she looks up at him again, the corners of her eyes are creased in what appears to be unhappiness. "I told my roommate I'd meet her in a few minutes."

"Of course." He was on his way to the grocery store to retrieve non-replicated produce and if he delays much longer, he will no longer have time to prepare the dinner he was planning.

She points. "I'm heading that way, if you are."

"I am not."

"That's-" She stands and tucks the padd against her stomach. "That's too bad."

"You are returning to your dorm?" he asks as she folds her hands over the padd.

"I don't think so, no." She shakes her head before stopping abruptly. "But is that the way you're walking?"

He tips his chin towards her padd, held as it is beneath her crossed hands. Her nails are a dark blue today and she repeatedly passes the padd of her thumb over her opposing thumbnail. "I simply wanted to inquire if you had sufficient time to conceal your padd before joining your friend."

She blinks and then laughs suddenly, raising the back of her hand to her mouth. "Oh, I should, shouldn't I?"

"I will not keep you."

She cuts over the grass to the nearest path that leads in the direction she is going, though halfway there, she spins around and walks backwards so she can face him as she calls, "It was good to see you."

Really, she should not walk like that. It is hardly efficient, nor safe. She steps backwards into the sunlight and the smile that forms over her face is bright and wide. He very nearly raises his hand in a gesture that he supposes would be a wave of farewell, but stills himself before he can begin to, instead offering, "You as well."

He waits until she is facing forward again before he turns away from the bench and the tree and the patch of shade she had found, the sun

still shining down through the leaves and her figure cutting across the quad when he looks back over his shoulder.

“

He hears her before he sees her, a bright laugh that rises above the din of the cafe's occupants. She stands at the counter conversing with the barista, both of them smiling at a joke he has not heard.

When her drink arrives, she waves to the other woman with a friendliness he has observed many times before, one that appears enduring across all environments and situations in which she engages.

As she leaves, he debates rising to greet her, though she might be on her way somewhere, or calling to her, though she might not hear him, or resuming his work, though he does not find himself with the compulsion to focus that he had only moments ago.

Before he can settle on a course of action, she is weaving through the crowd, her cup held in both hands and the smile not yet faded from her face.

"You come here too?" she asks and though the question is obvious, he finds himself answering it.

"At times."

"Like now? I keep bumping into you."

"Only once," he corrects and her smile widens.

"I think that one was on you."

He allows his head to tip towards the side. "Debatable."

She covers the smile with her mug of tea, sipping from it with her eyes on him. "I tried that once," she says when she has swallowed and points one finger to his theris masu.

He is unable to entirely mask his surprise. "You did?"

"It wasâ€¦ memorable."

"It is not palatable to humans."

"You can say that again," she says and laughs much like she did at the counter. "But don't actually, since I could do without remembering it."

That does not account for why she has then raised the topic, though the incongruity can perhaps be laid aside as he has no real intention of probing further. Instead, he asks, "What are you doing with your day?"

"Just getting some tea," she says and lifts her cup slightly.

"I can see."

"No other big plans." She takes a sip. "You?"

"Revising syllabuses."

Her eyes narrow slightly, though behind her mug he can still see her smile. "You're not assigning even more reading than you did last semester, right?"

He is not. "Perhaps."

"I don't want to think about your next round of Morphology students suffering under any more than we did." She purses her lips, an expression he typically only saw when she was deep in thought, and yet now appears seemingly in conjunction with her continued smile. "Though don't let them off easy, either."

"I am not teaching Advanced Morphology this semester."

"Oh." She lowers her mug, holding it clasped in both hands just in front of her. "I didn't realize that."

"It will not be offered again until the following semester."

She readjusts her grip, lacing her fingers together. "Well." She looks down at the lid on her cup and then back at him. "I'm glad I got a chance to work with you when I did."

"It was-" He has to search for a word, and even with the hesitation he allows himself, he is not certain he chooses the correct one, one that truly encapsulates his meaning. "Fortunate."

"It was." She opens her mouth to speak, though seemingly stops herself because she only takes another sip of tea and then says, "I don't meant to keep you from your work, I just wanted to say hi."

"It is not pressing."

"A couple more days to enjoy that, right?"

"A few."

Her eyes on her cup, she says, "It never seems quite long enough."

Her goodbye, as cheerful as it is with her smile and her wish for him to have a pleasant afternoon, leaves him alone in the midst of the crowd of other patrons. Across from him, the chair at the other side of the table suddenly seems far emptier than it previously was. He banishes the thought as soon as it forms, for it does not do to dwell on such fanciful ideas as the one that springs to mind of the vacancy of the chair, nor too is the image of her occupying it at all helpful.

He pulls his padd to him with a scrape of it across the table. It is entirely too long before his thoughts coalesce around his work, and longer still until he can keep himself from continually looking up from his work to inspect the chair, as if the next time he does, it will not be unoccupied.

â€|

He joins the streams of cadets and instructors as they cross the quad under the tolling of the Academy bell, the peals ringing out across campus and pounding into his ears. It takes longer to walk even halfway to his office than it would have only the day before, though of course he also had to wait for the turbo lift, what with newly returned faculty also leaving their quarters at the same time, and will likely be forced to similarly navigate the crowds in the lobby of the Xenolinguistics Building when he reaches it.

The masses of personnel seem to move of their own accord, flowing out from dorms and the mess hall and towards academic buildings, parting only for obstacles such as trees and benches and the few clusters of students who have stopped in the way of others to greet friends.

From one of them, an individual detaches.

"I'll catch up with you later," he hears, followed by, "Commander!"

He stops walking. "Just Spock," he corrects. He readjusts his grip on his padd. "As you said, you are unlikely to take any more of my classes."

"I looked them up, you know." She hitches her bag higher on her shoulder. "I'm definitely not taking Intro to Syntax - do you fall asleep teaching that course?"

"No."

"But do you want to?"

He does not answer, which causes her to laugh.

He must leave in only a moment. She is still smiling. "How was your break?"

She lifts her shoulders, her eyes darting out across the quad. "It was fine, I guess."

"What classes are you taking?" he asks, and then supplies, "Cardassian, I know."

"And Theory of Standard Etymology, and Comparative Neurolinguistics." She grimaces. "And Intermediate Interstellar Nav." She tips her head across the quad. "I'm headed there now, actually."

"I trust you can find it?"

There is a moment in which he is unsure she will meet the question with any degree of amusement but then she is laughing again, louder this time, her head tipped back. "That's-" She points a finger at him and opens her mouth to tell him what precisely it is, only to be interrupted by the next ring of the bell, this one increasing the pace of the cadets still on the quad and not yet in their classes. She bites at her lip, her smile somewhat stanchied. "I guess I'll see you around."

His response comes easily, despite how he registers that he really must be walking now, and at a rather brisk pace. "I would enjoy that."

Her head, which has dropped slightly, comes up rather quickly to look at him. "Me too."

There seems to be more to say with how they both remain there, their attention on each other and her eyes on him, more appraising than is typical. He is certain there are words that will capture what it will be like to begin the semester anew without her presence in his office, but the only ones that come to mind revolve around his gratitude for the assistance she offered the previous term and he is certain that is not what he means. At a loss, he takes a step backwards, only to find that with the motion, her face falls, and it is then that he realizes she was once again on the verge of speaking.

"Yes?" he asks, quelling the compulsion to hurry towards his class.

"Nothing, nothing." She shakes her head and offers him a wave. "Have a great start to your term," she says and then she is gone and he is instructing himself to once again begin moving across the quad, despite the fact that it is a moment before he does so.

End
file.